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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Column Editor's Note: In this issue, we are privileged to print the commentary of veteran reviewers **Burton Callicott** and **Jared A. Seay**. While the books they explore are divergent in content, their subjects share a common thread: passion. **Writers and Personality** by **Louis Auchincloss** radiates the author's passion of literary giants and the written word. The same fervor of gaming and gamers is exuded in **R. V. Kelly 2's Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games**.

As I prepare this month's **Monographic Musings** column, I am sadly counting down my last days in the **Addlestone Library** and getting ready for my move to the **College of**

Charleston's Office of Accreditation, Planning, and Assessment. My departure from this fine library is bitter-sweet; as I will sorely miss the warm and intelligent people beside whom I have worked as well as my duties as a librarian, I am excited at the opportunity to tackle the issues of student learning outcomes and learning centers — at the forefront of which is the **Addlestone Library**. I am indebted to the wonderful and amazing **Katina Strauch** for allowing me to stay in tune with my library roots by continuing to edit and write book reviews for **ATG**.

Happy reading, everyone! — **DV**



Auchincloss, Louis. *Writers and Personality*. Columbia, SC: U. of South Carolina P, 2005. 1570035806. 128 pages. \$24.95.

Reviewed by **Burton Callicott** (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston)
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After reading the first few sentences of **Auchincloss'** latest from the **University of South Carolina Press**, I knew I was in for a treat. Having gotten a BA and an MA in English in the early and mid-'90's, I have consumed my fair share of continental literary theory and criticism. For many, including myself, who began their deeper involvement in literature in the post-modern age, **Barthes**, **Deleuze**, **Foucault**, etc. were real heroes who provided joyful, exciting tools and terms to comment on familiar and thoroughly-criticized authors. Like most good things, however, this novel, theoretical approach to literature began to lose its luster and, at least for me, became rather tiresome. So it was like a breath of fresh air to crack the spine of my review copy of

Writer's and Personality and read "**Henry James** expressed what many readers have comfortably — and some uncomfortably — felt about the strong and seemingly unbreakable ties between the lives of the three Bronte sisters and their novels....." (3).

What a pleasure it is to read critical prose such as **Auchincloss'** that flows and is readily comprehensible. What a delight it is to encounter a reference to **Henry James** and to speak openly and directly about actual, real life authors and their... personality! The short chapters and wide selection of authors and works discussed in this somewhat anachronistic treatise will make most readers very comfortable and will provide sheer joy to lovers of classic novels and writers. After a few paragraphs, I

immediately felt as if I had been transported to **Auchincloss'** parlor, in front of a fire, with a nice snifter of brandy, seated in a leather easy chair after a satisfying meal where I was treated to a wonderful, impromptu exposition on the **Bronte** sisters. This illusion continued for me as **Auchincloss** flowed easily (and quickly!), many "chapters" are only a few pages long) from the **Brontes** to **Flaubert** and then to **Trollope** and so on. **Auchincloss** manages to cover twenty four authors in a book of just over 100 pages. Though there is no clear, overarching principle behind his selections of authors and works, the choices feel organic. With the simple thesis that an author's personality imbues his or her work whether or not that is the author's intent, **Auchincloss** frees himself to roam across time periods, continents, and even languages. (In keeping with the purity and sensibility of the commentary, quotations from French novels are printed in the *langua franca*.) "It would seem then that **Flaubert** has succeeded in suppressing all evidence of his personality. And yet some of it seeps gratifyingly through. The man who is so intensely conscious of all the cheats of a self-advertising civilization and the daydreaming which it engenders to keep the masses chained in the kind of half life that Emma leads, emerges from time to time in his mordant humor and compassion for the dumb and easily led" (12).

As an author of numerous novels and works of fiction of his own, not to mention his voluminous critical commentary, **Auchincloss'** conveys a sense of strength and confidence that comes from a life spent writing and reading. His comments not only provide astute critical observations but also provide a unique look into the mind of a creative writer. Scattered throughout **Writers and Personality**, we get glimpses of the mechanics and orchestration necessary to produce a successful novel that only a fellow novelist would see and note: "The cleverest part of the novel [*The Late George Apley*] is in the quotations from [Apley's] letters and public addresses, in which one follows the gradual desiccation of his soul and the ultimate triumph of moral platitudes over heartfelt ideals — all against the gloomy backdrop of his own half-awareness of what is really going on" (81). As with many things, **Auchincloss'** greatest


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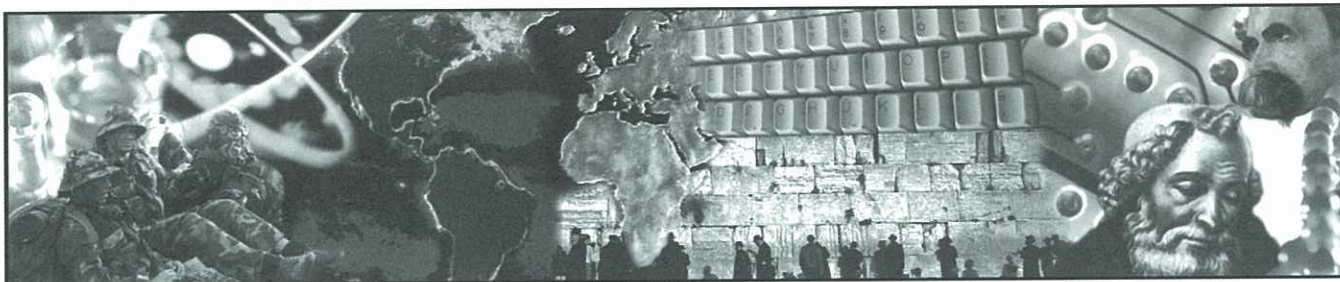
From the Reference Desk from page 55

as diverse as early technology and materials, development in film style, social contexts, and individual film companies.

While the development of early cinema was most obvious in the United States and Great Britain, it blossomed in a number of other countries. An examination of the **Encyclopedia** makes this clear. Some of the longest entries discuss cinema in individual countries and cover areas like production and distribution, exhibition, audiences, and regulations. The **Encyclopedia** also has articles covering film companies existing in countries ranging from China to Spain and from India to Finland, as well as entries on prominent filmmakers and other key figures in countries ranging from Brazil to Norway and from Japan to Germany.

All in all, there are more than 950 entries contributed by nearly 150 scholars and film specialists. The articles are straightforward and factual with the longer entries followed by brief bibliographies. The thematic entry list and general index provide access and related articles are highlighted in bold in each article.

The **Encyclopedia of Early Cinema** portrays the complex and rich history of a medium that was to evolve into a dominant cultural and artistic form, as well as a significant international industry. It is a fascinating story and this useful reference will help students and other interested readers explore its full scope. Primarily intended for academic libraries, this work may also find an audience in larger public libraries where film is major interest and budgets can afford the somewhat steep price. 



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strength can also be seen to be his greatest weakness. The confidence and apparent ease with which the essays in this book seem to flow can sometimes make the material feel a bit cheap and/or brash. Because many of the essays are so short, they may leave readers feeling like they want more elaboration and need more evidence to back up bold claims.

It is interesting that the book is "dedicated to Susan Henshaw Jones, director and president of the Museum of the City of New York," in that the experience of reading this book sometimes feels comparable to the experience of a museum visit. A reader can stroll from interesting exhibit to interesting exhibit, roughly following an intended progression, and glean just enough information to create a desire for a fuller, more nuanced treatment of the subject. Some of the short expository paragraphs that begin with conjunctions or pronouns such as "But," "And," "He," and "She," may lead the reader into thinking that the book may have been stitched together from the author's personal journal or was not written with the intent of being published. Here is a complete paragraph from the chapter on **Dreiser**:

He has only kind words for **Clyde's** afflicted mother, and he has a tolerance, somewhat tempered by condescension, for her deep Christian faith, but as an

agnostic, if not an atheist, at this time in his life, he could not imagine that religion could do much more than ease on occasional ache. (28)

Again, for the most part, these kinds of conversational utterances are as fun and full of content as they are frustrating for a lack of polish and fine tuning.

Although this book will sit comfortably and proudly on the shelves of many public and aca-

demic libraries, it poses a real challenge for librarians — catalogers and reference librarians alike. The breadth of its coverage and the looseness of its thesis make it as difficult to categorize as it will be to turn up in a catalog search. The intent of this book, however, is not to be mined by students for choice quotes to fill their own assigned essays, but to be enjoyed in an armchair for no other reason than to enrich one's experience of literature.

Kelly 2, R.V. *Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games: The People, the Addiction, and the Playing Experience*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004. 0786419156. \$32.00.

Reviewed by **Jared A. Seay** (Reference Librarian, College of Charleston)
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Massively multiplayer online role-playing games, or **MMORPGs** as they are known, are self contained three-dimensional worlds inhabited sometimes by thousands of players. To anyone who has never played such a game (myself included), but who wants to understand what it is all about, this is an absorbing book. **Kelly 2** (I assume this is his screen name, since no other reference to any other name is made) explores the psychology and slang of the players, many of whom are quite addicted to the game, explaining the moral codes, massive economies, and cultures that intrinsically inhabit

these game worlds. It readily explains what the big deal is. And it is a big — multi-billion-dollar — deal.

Beginning the book describing one of his own 24-hour immersion episodes into the game, **Kelly 2** adeptly imparts why many people eschew sleep, food, and most other comforts, staring bleary eyed and sitting muscle sore at a computer screen while they lead their character across a fantasy landscape of monsters, treasure, war, survival and adventure. The games are so addictive simply because they literally plunge

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the player into a graphically beautiful world in which s/he can be anyone, amass power, glory and wealth and interact (either friendly or violently) with other people who are doing the same.

In countless interviews with players, **Kelly 2** explores the social, economic and political relationships that evolve in these games. In any given game, online players can be from all over the (real) world. Within the context of the game, players band together for mutual defense and converse in the abbreviated keyboard slang that is common to games (and found in instant messaging and email). Conversation begun on in-game topics (i.e., cooperating to kill that big monster that is about to make mincemeat of our party) often evolves into other topics as players discover mutual interests or simply ask for help. **Kelly 2** gives the example of meeting up with a party in the game that consisted of a French girl, an Englishman, some Germans and a couple of guys from Denmark. After this party helped him dispatch a particularly nasty creature that was attacking him, the French girl announced that she was up against a tough English test soon and wondered if anyone could help her with it online. She received that help.

Of course, as **Kelly 2** points out, MMORPGs are not all cooperation and happiness. On the contrary, the worlds are filled with virtual violence, destruction, killing, and deceit. It is, at times, a free-for-all to be sure. The interesting thing is that the vast number of players involved in any one game world tend to evolve into self-regulating societies (though still usually somewhat cut-throat), complete with moral codes of conducts, dynamic economy and trade, and political and social institutions. In fact, the economy of one such game world has been found to be the 77th largest economy in the world — somewhere between Russian and Bulgaria. And this is not simply virtual currency. Some hard core gamers actually make a fine living by accruing objects of wealth in the game world and then literally selling them for American dollars to other players on sites like eBay.

This book would be a valuable title for any public or academic library. Though it would complement teen and young adult collections, it would also benefit adults and researchers interested in the details of this multi-billion dollar industry and the incredible impact these games are having socially, politically and economically (not to mention how it is changing the way people learn and think). **Massively Multiplayer Online Role-**

Playing Games is a solid introduction to the on-goings of the **MMORPG** world, the psychology of players and their evolving social and political interactions, the production of **MMORPGs**, and their possible future. The book contains an appendix of online addiction organizations and **MMORPG** information sites. It has an index and a good starting bibliography, although a bit heavy on fiction books like *The Three Musketeers*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and *Werewolf*. While the afore-mentioned titles may be of great background interest to those who actually play the games, other nonfiction titles such as *Got Game* and *Digital Game Based Learning* (unfortunately not included in the bibliography) offer fantastic explanations and illustrations of what games have actually done to transform our society.

Kelly 2 quotes Sean O'Faolain with writing, "There is only one admirable form of the imagination: the imagination that is so intense that it creates a new reality..." Online gaming is (so far) the most ultimate form of new reality and needs to be understood as the massive societal-changing force that it is. Gaming is literally creating a new reality, and thus changing the perception of the current one. 🐾

Rumors from page 48

and is doing well. It's enough to inspire us all!

Have you seen *Investigators Guide to Steganography* by **Gregory Kipper**? (Auerbach Publications, 2004). Hmm... What is steganography? A form of hidden communication.

You know, it's just plain exciting to get all these holiday greeting cards at his time of year. For example, I just got one from my long-time friend, **Bob Miranda**, who I will always associate with **Asti's** the opera restaurant in New York (he hosted a dinner there for **LAPT**, the precursor to **LCATS**) and **Pergamon Press**. This year his card came from **Miranda Press**, an imprint of **Cognizant Communication Corporation**. Pretty amazing, the things that people get up to! In fact, curious, I decided to poke around on the Internet and look for **Miranda Press** and, lo and behold, what to my wondering eyes should appear but the **Cognizant Communications Website** with all sorts of in-

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WEBWORTHY

Column Editor: **Pamela M. Rose, M.L.S.** (Web Services & Library Promotion Coordinator, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo; Phone: 716-829-3900 x129; Fax: 716-829-2211) <pmrose@buffalo.edu> wings.buffalo.edu/~pmrose

Webworthy has reviewed 346 Websites to date! Are you reading this intro? If so, we'd like to know if you find this column useful! Email the editor at <pmrose@buffalo.edu> with your comments and any suggestions for improvement!

Websites are chosen for uniqueness, depth of information, functionality and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and are visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any broken links. Comments and suggestions welcome! Pamela M. Rose, <pmrose@buffalo.edu>, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-3900 x129. Unless otherwise noted, Internet sites were also reviewed in Science's NetWatch column. — PR

Evolutionary Genetics

British geneticist and mathematician **R.A. Fisher's** (1890-1962) achievements, including seven books, several hundred papers, and scientific correspondence with its thought-provoking content and ideas for further development, are attracting increasing attention for their far-reaching consequences. The **R. A. Fisher Digital Archive** from the Uni-

versity of Adelaide Library in Australia now allows readers to browse more than 170 of **Fisher's** complex and eclectic work, which probe questions such as the origin of dominant genes and the inheritance of the Rh blood groups. Follow along **Fisher's** correspondence as he discusses heredity, natural selection, and other topics with thinkers such as **Charles Darwin's** son **Leonard**, a soldier and scientist. **Fisher's** papers also reveal what **Stephen Jay Gould** called one of his "major-league errors," his campaign to discredit the link between smoking and lung cancer. — <http://www.library.adelaide.edu.au/digitised/fisher>

Taxonomy

535,000 down, 1.24 million to go! With an ambitious agenda of creating a validated checklist of all the world's species (plants, animals, fungi and microbes) using consistent taxonomy by 2011, **Species 2000** is well on its way. Bringing together an array of global species databases covering each of the major groups of organisms, the "federation," in partnership with the **Integrated Taxonomic Information**

system (ITIS) of North America, currently produces the **Catalogue of Life** — an Annual Checklist available on the **Species 2000** Website and by CD ROM. — <http://www.sp2000.org> 🐾

